

HOW TO DO RESEARCH

Grant T. Hammond
Air War College

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: WHAT WE WANT TO AVOID

“Your manuscript is both good and original; but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good.”

Samuel Johnson

RESEARCH

- From the French “rechercher”
 - to travel through or survey
- Careful, systematic, patient study & investigation in some field of knowledge
- Undertaken for the purpose of discovering or establishing facts or principles

DECIDING ON A PURPOSE

- **What do I intend to do in this paper?**
 - **Describe and analyze how something is done?**
 - **Discover what happened at a particular time and place?**
 - **Understand and explain a concept?**
 - **Marshall evidence to persuade others on a particular point of view?**

DECIDING ON A TOPIC

- Let the ideas percolate for awhile. . .
 - See what sticks, what you keep going back to
- What am I most interested in?
- Do I want to know a lot about a little or a little about a lot?
- Narrower papers are easier, broader ones more difficult

DECIDING ON A TOPIC

- **On what topic do I wish to do a paper?**
 - **What is the subject or thrust of my research?**
 - **How many elements are there to this topic?**
 - **Can I make it more focused, more specific?**
- **What do I NOT want to investigate?**
 - **What are the boundaries of the topic?**
 - **How do I decide to include and exclude certain aspects?**

ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

- All data is equal unless you discriminate among it with questions
- Cannot find an answer without a question
- Asking the right question is critical to doing good research
- Need to refine the relevant questions and focus on the most important one(s)
- The question is the focus of research

HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE?

- **Figure half the time is for research**
- **The other half is for writing--and rewriting**
- **How much time can you devote to it?**
 - **In what increments?**
 - **Over what period?**
- **Exert control over the material**
 - **If you don't set a time frame for research and writing, you will read and write endlessly**

THINK ABOUT THE TOPIC

- List all your potential working titles
- List the elements involved in assessing this subject
- Cluster the elements and different aspects of the subject
- Outline the topic to give it some form
- Is the shape that is emerging what you want or need?

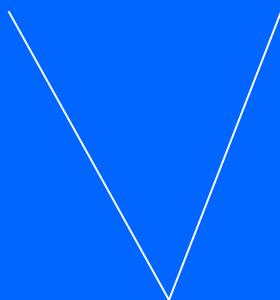
SELECT A GOOD WORKING TITLE

- The title should state the focus of the inquiry
- It should show the boundaries of the topic
- Incorporate the main purpose and the topic
- Eliminate extraneous concerns
- If lucky, it can be clever and catchy, memorable

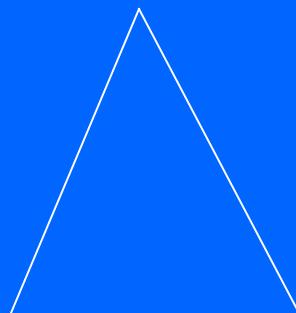
IMPOSE LOGIC ON CHAOS

- Organize the elements into a logical approach of some kind --
 - Inductive (specific to general)
 - Deductive (general to specific)
 - Chronological (time sequence
 - Forward--Backward--Mix
 - Overview (assess all parts of a debate, dispute)
 - Problem statement, assessment and recommendation

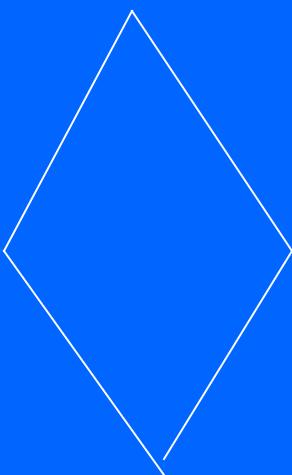
Diagrams of Logic Flow



Funnel



Inverted Funnel



Diamond



Hour Glass

IMPOSE LOGIC ON CHAOS

- Clarity and transparency work best--
 - Can be clear to you, not to your reader
- Leave lots of blank spaces around clusters or outline for later comments
- Be flexible
 - You have a direction, but you don't know what you will find along the way
- Write down everything you think of about the topic

TURN YOUR RESEARCH NOTES INTO PRECISE QUESTIONS

- What do you need to know?
- What specific questions must be answered to write this paper?
- What--specifically--do you need to find out to do this? Where can you find it?
- If you don't need it for the paper, don't use it in the paper!

WHAT KIND OF ANSWERS DO YOU NEED?

- Anecdotal information?
- Historical background?
- Statistical data?
- Corroboration from multiple sources?
- How much data do you need?
- What kind of authority is required?
- How up to date must information be?

DO ANSWERS NEED TO COME FROM PRIMARY OR SECONDARY COURSES?

- Primary sources are special because they have
 - Reliability
 - Timeliness
 - Real world relevance to then
- Secondary sources are
 - Interpretations by others
 - Both more general and more focused

PLAGIARISM

- **Using the ideas, words or data of others as if it is your own**
- ***Don't do it!!!***
- **It is lying, cheating, stealing and conduct unbecoming an officer**
- **Grounds for dismissal—has happened**
- **But a paper full of others' citations is not a paper**
- **Check with instructor if unsure**

HOW TO BEGIN

- **Check library and internet sources**
- **Select—**
 - The newest
 - The author who has written the most on topic
 - What you think are best sources
- **Check out or print no more than 6 total (books and articles)**
- **Use these before proceeding**
- **Use their bibliography and notes to continue**

SAVE EVERYTHING IN YOUR RESEARCH

- That crumpled note in the wastebasket might be just the insight you need
- Never write on both sides of a sheet of paper!
- Write down your thoughts as you proceed, not just those of others
- Key each bit of information, quotation, etc. to its source
 - Call # or website, author/title, p. #
 - Label and date all notes, each draft

CREATE A MASTER BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Keep a master list of *all* sources consulted
 - print
 - audio-visual
 - interviews
 - internet
- Annotate each source as to its value & focus
- State full bibliographic citation for all sources

THIS REALLY IS NOT THAT DIFFICULT

- **Begin--that's the hard part**
- **Keep focused**
- **Impose your will on the subject**
- **Persevere**
- **Get reinforcement from time to time**
- **Stay in touch with your advisor—
weekly**
- **WRITE!!!**

WRITING

“Writing is easy. All you do is stare at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.”

Gene Fowler (1890 - 1960)

WRITING

- **It doesn't matter which part you start writing but start!**
- **It can be the beginning, the middle or the end (but they have to fit)**
- **Make yourself write some each day, if only a paragraph on some section of the paper**
- **Make sure you are following your outline of the topic**
- **Let it sit—read aloud—correct and rewrite**

PARTING SHOT

**“Unprovided with original learning,
uninformed in the habits of thinking,
unskilled in the arts of composition,
I resolved to write a book.”**

Edward Gibbon, author

*Decline and Fall of the Roman
Empire*